

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

GREGORY S. KONTAXES,	)	
Plaintiff,	)	Civil Action No. 12-1160
	)	
vs.	)	Judge Mark Hornak/
	)	Magistrate Judge Maureen P. Kelly
STEVEN GARY KONTAXES,	)	
Defendant.	)	

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

**I. RECOMMENDATION**

It is respectfully recommended that, pursuant to the screening provisions of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Complaint be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

**II. REPORT**

Gregory S. Kontaxes, ("Plaintiff") has filed a civil rights Complaint, alleging that his constitutional rights were violated by the Defendant, his brother, Steven Gary Kontaxes, a police officer for the city of Perryopolis. Plaintiff claims that his brother, perjured himself at Plaintiff's first trial, and conspired to obstruct justice in Plaintiff's second trial, and used his authority as a police officer to illegally seize Plaintiff's property and sell the property. Plaintiff also complains that his brother took his share of an inheritance. Plaintiff claims that these events took place after January 7, 2001, i.e., the date Plaintiff committed the offense for which he was tried and at which trial his brother testified. Because the actions Plaintiff alleges that were taken by Plaintiff's brother occurred in or around January 7, 2001 and for some time thereafter and Plaintiff did not file the instant suit until, July 4, 2012, at the earliest, when he executed his

Motion for Leave to Proceed In Forma Pauperis, the Complaint is time-barred and must be dismissed.

#### **A. PROCEDURAL AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

At the time of the initiation of this civil action, Plaintiff was a prisoner in the State Correctional Institution at Rockview (“SCI-Rockview”). Plaintiff is proceeding pro se and his Motion for Leave to Proceed In Forma Pauperis (“IFP Motion”) has been granted. The IFP Motion was signed on July 4, 2012. ECF No. 1 at 1. Plaintiff attached the Complaint to his IFP Motion. Service of process has not yet been made on the Defendant.

#### **B. APPLICABLE LEGAL PRINCIPLES**

In the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), Congress adopted major changes affecting civil rights actions brought by prisoners in an effort to curb the increasing number of frivolous and harassing law suits brought by persons in custody. The PLRA permits courts to screen complaints filed by prisoners and dismiss them before they are served if the complaints fail to state a claim or are frivolous or malicious. See Santana v. United States, 98 F.3d 752, 755 (3d Cir. 1996). Because Plaintiff is a prisoner who has been granted IFP status and/or because Plaintiff sues a government employee, the screening provisions of the PLRA apply. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, (“[t]he court shall review, before docketing, if feasible or, in any event, as soon as practicable after docketing, a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.”). See also 28 U.S.C. §1915(e) (“[n]otwithstanding any filing fee, or any portion thereof, that may have been paid [by a prisoner granted IFP status], the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that– (A) the allegation of poverty is untrue; or (B) the action or appeal– (i) is frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which

relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.”).

In performing the Court’s mandated function of sua sponte review of complaints under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A & 1915(e) to determine if they fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, a federal district court applies the same standard applied to motions to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). See, e.g., Powell v. Hoover, 956 F. Supp. 564, 568 (M.D. Pa. 1997)(applying Rule 12(b)(6) standard to claim dismissed under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)).

In reviewing complaints as mandated by 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A & 1915(e) and in applying the standards applicable to a 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss, the complaint must be read in the light most favorable to the plaintiff and all well-pleaded, material allegations of fact in the complaint must be taken as true. See Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97 (1976). Furthermore, because Plaintiff is pro se, courts accord an even more liberal reading of the complaint, employing less stringent standards when considering pro se pleadings than when judging the work product of an attorney. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972).

### **C. DISCUSSION**

Even though Plaintiff does not specifically mention 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which is the Civil Rights Act, in the Complaint, because Plaintiff is seeking to vindicate his constitutional rights (see, e.g., ECF No. 3 at 2, ¶ III, claiming violations of his constitutional rights) and because he does not have a cause of action directly under the Constitution of the United States, a liberal reading of the Complaint requires the court to construe it as one invoking the court’s federal question jurisdiction pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See, e.g., Arpin v. Santa Clara Valley Transp. Agency, 261 F.3d 912, 925 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2001) (“a litigant complaining of a violation of a

constitutional right does not have a direct cause of action under the United States Constitution but must utilize 42 U.S.C. § 1983.”); Pauk v. Board of Trustees of City University of New York, 654 F.2d 856 (2d Cir 1981) (where a federal statute governing civil action for deprivation of rights provides a remedy, *i.e.*, 42 U.S.C. § 1983, an implied cause of action grounded on the Constitution is not available), *overruling on other grounds as recognized in*, Brandman v. North Shore Guidance Center, 636 F.Supp. 877, 879 (E.D.N.Y. 1986). Hence, the Court construes the current civil action as alleging a cause of action under Section 1983.

Congress did not specify a statute of limitations for actions arising under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 of the Civil Rights law. Wilson v. Garcia, 471 U.S. 261, 267 (1985), *overruled by statute on other grounds as recognized in*, Hurst v. Trader, 223 F. App’x 128, 131 (3d Cir. 2007). Because of this, the Courts are to consider Section 1983 actions as tort actions and borrow the statute of limitations for personal injury or tort actions from the appropriate State. Wilson v. Garcia, 471 U.S. at 267 to 275. The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has declared that for Section 1983 actions brought in the Federal courts, located within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the appropriate statute of limitations is two years. Fitzgerald v. Larson, 769 F.2d 160, 162 (3d Cir. 1985) (“the two-year Pennsylvania limitation for personal injury actions of 42 Pa.Const.Stat.Ann. § 5524 governs all § 1983 actions brought in Pennsylvania.”). The statute of limitations requires that a complaint be filed within its time limits from the time a cause of action accrues. See Sprint Communications Co., L.P. v. F.C.C., 76 F.3d 1221, 1226 (D.C. Cir. 1996).

A United States District Court may *sua sponte* raise the statute of limitations in screening a complaint so long as the statute of limitations defect is apparent from the face of the complaint.

See, e.g., Dellis v. Corrections Corp. of America, 257 F.3d 508, 511 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2001); Tate v. United States, 13 F. App'x 726 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2001).

In the case at issue, the wrongs complained of by Plaintiff, allegedly occurred in or around January 7, 2001 and for some time thereafter. Plaintiff did not “file”<sup>2</sup> his IFP Motion, which would stop the running the of the statute of limitations,<sup>3</sup> until, at the earliest, July 4, 2012, *i.e.*, roughly eleven years after the alleged wrongs were being perpetrated by the Defendant. Thus, it is clear from the face of the Complaint that Plaintiff failed to commence his lawsuit within the two year applicable statute of limitations. Accordingly, the action should be dismissed before service for failing to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, given that the statute of limitations bars the suit.

### III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth herein, it is recommended that the action be dismissed.

In accordance with the Magistrate Judges Act, 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), and Local Rule 72.D.2, the parties are permitted to file written objections in accordance with the schedule established in the docket entry reflecting the filing of this Report and Recommendation. Objections are to be submitted to the Clerk of Court, United States District Court, 700 Grant Street, Room 3110, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Failure to timely file objections will waive the right

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<sup>2</sup> Plaintiff's application for IFP status was not signed until July 4, 2012, ECF No. 1 at 2, which is the earliest this Court could deem Plaintiff's suit as being filed, which is well beyond the two year limitations period. See Cromwell v. Keane, 27 F. App'x 13 (2d Cir. 2001) (for prisoner mail box rule, a prisoner is deemed to file his pleading on the date which he hands it to prison officials for mailing; in the absence of evidence as to when this is, the court should deem the date whereon the prisoner signed his IFP application as the date whereon he handed his pleading to the prison officials).

<sup>3</sup> Richardson v. Diagnostic Rehabilitation Center, 836 F.Supp. 252, 254 (E.D. Pa. 1993) (“While a complaint accompanied by an i.f.p. motion is usually not deemed ‘filed’ until leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* is granted or the filing fee is paid, the filing of the motion tolls the applicable statute of limitations.”).

to appeal. Brightwell v. Lehman, 637 F.3d 187, 193 n. 7 (3d Cir. 2011). Any party opposing objections may file their response to the objections within fourteen (14) days thereafter in accordance with Local Civil Rule 72.D.2.

December 17, 2012

s/Maureen P. Kelly  
MAUREEN P. KELLY  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

cc: The Honorable Mark Hornak  
United States District Judge

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